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Synopsis

This thesis explores the problematic of the controversial English education policy of the Left Front government of West Bengal from 1977 to 2007. Apart from "Introduction" and "Conclusion" there are four intermediary chapters: "The Colonial Logic and Legacy of English Education in India;" "Decolonizing the Mind? Government Policies about English Studies in India;" "Framing English Textbooks: The Inherent Contradiction" and "Can the Student Speak? Rethinking Classroom Pedagogy."

The legacy of English education took strong roots in colonial Bengal as Calcutta (now Kolkata) was the capital of British India for nearly one hundred and fifty years. The introduction and institutionalization of English education were based upon logic of diverse kinds propounded by various ideologically motivated interest groups like---evangelical missionaries; bureaucrats; administrators; Utilitarians; Orientalists; Anglicists; indigenous elites; the nationalists; subalterns, religious minorities and Dalits, etc. Thus, since colonial times English became a contested site of hegemonies and counter hegemonies. After much tension between all the concerned parties the English question was officially resolved by the end of 1830s, especially after passing the draft of Macaulay's Minute in 1835. But this draft itself is a proof of the fact that not merely sound pedagogical logic but extra-pedagogical concerns also in most cases guided the authority in framing the English education policy. During the colonial period English acquired both positive and negative connotations and they have remained germinal in giving English the controversial status even after the Independence till the present time.

Even after the Independence English posed a problematic to all strata of the society and politics. The centrist, the fundamentalist and the regional political parties all have certain ideological stances regarding to English. Post-Independence nationalism and the ideology of a nation-state on the wake of newly achieved freedom prompted the central government to downsize English that was regarded as the vestige of colonization and promote Hindi as the Official language of the Union. The Left Front Government (1977-2011) of West Bengal upholding pro-proletariat ideology deemed English as an elitist discipline and the main reason behind large scale illiteracy, inadequate mother-tongue acquisition, drop out and repetition in the field of school education. It, therefore, banned English from the Primary Education stage and reintroduced it in Class VI in 1983. But the next two decades saw unusual and hectic policy

changes in the field of English education. In 1994 following Ashoke Mitra Commission's recommendation English was reintroduced in Class V. Again the proposal of the One Man committee chaired by Pabitra Sarkar persuaded the government to start English informally at the second semester of Class II and full-fledgedly at Class III. Once more, despite the criticism of the Ranjugopal Mukhopadhyay Committee the Government brought English at Class I in 2004. This erratic policy changes, especially three times in a decade from 1994 to 2004, indicates a conflict between core ideology and the realpolitik within the communist parties and the Left Front Government. The later changes were desperately aimed at amendment of the initially taken decision of deferring English till Class VI. The Government had to surrender its allegedly pro-proletariat stance to the pro-English demand of the middle class and middle class aspirants that had monopolized the benefit of its various kinds of pro-people reforms like job security, salary hike, land reform, political stability and etc.

The English textbook is an important aspect of the praxis of English education. The idea of applying the English textbook as an Ideological State Apparatus meant for hegemony formation germinated during the colonial era. Thus the discipline of English in the colonial days incorporated literary, philosophical, historical, political and religious texts to produce ideal colonial citizen loyal to the ruler and trustworthy for the government's services. In post-Independence era too the English textbook served as a medium of dissemination of ideologies like national identity formation, national integration, communal harmony, patriotism and etc. but apart from these overt ideologies there can be noticed through close reading of the textbooks produced during the Left Front era covert discrimination along gender, caste, religion and class. Representational injustice towards religious minorities, subalterns and Dalits; stereotypical descriptions of gender roles, class relations and generalized comparison between the country and the city tend to imprint upon the impressionable minds of the students deep rooted prejudices resulting in gender discrimination, class exploitation and religious and caste-based intolerance in the long run. Second most evident characteristic of the English textbooks remains their fascination with mainly British literary texts. The poetry section laden with alien concepts and descriptions of nature has remained incongruous with the immediate environment of the students. Apart from them poetry like "If" and fiction like "the Birth of a White Seal", an excerpt from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book,*are often accused of carrying colonialist's ideology. But they were repeated in subsequent editions making the dream of decolonization of the discipline of English an illusion. Thus evidence of colonial hangover can be found out from the fact that Indian English literature, especially in the poetry section, is rarely discovered in the textbooks.

Classroom pedagogy is another significant practical aspect of English education. Since colonial period India has seen various types of experimentation in the field of approaches, methods and techniques of English language teaching like English education in classical manner like teaching of Latin and Greek; English tinged with evangelical morality especially in missionary schools; secular English education in government and private-run schools; Grammar Translation Method; Oral approach; Direct Method; Reading Method; Situational-Structuralist Approach; Play-way Approach; Drill Technique and etc. But the Left Front Government in the very beginning of their policy experimentation with English education adopted the newly emerged Functional-communicative Approach. The apparent aim was to end the monopoly of the teacher and the textbook and to ensure collective participation of the students. But the unqualified reception of the new pedagogical approach became a source of criticism as it failed

completely due to lack of competent teachers especially the trained ones; diversity at the level of infrastructure and management; negligence at arranging orientation programmes for teachers; lack of clarity in the teaching objective; lack of co-ordination between policy and praxis; and many other social reality. Thus, it is seen that the Left Front Government of West Bengal failed at the level of both policy and praxis in their ideological experimentation vis-à-vis English education. They are guilty of wrong judgment of history, political economy and social reality. In a word they were set to deprive the proletariat of the same weapon that was empowering the capitalists to exploit them. Again their vision to establish an egalitarian society devoid of discrimination and exploitation was blurred too as they failed to implement it at the practical level of textbooks and classroom pedagogy.

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